

## **FACILITATING GROUP BEGINNINGS**

**There are two primary areas of concern for members as they enter the group:**

- 1. Issues relating to people**
- 2. Issues relating to group purpose and structure**

**1. Issues relating to people in the group.**

- 1. Acceptance** (Who are these people? What are they like? What will they think of me? How will I fit in? Do I have anything in common with these people? Why should I come back?).

**Task 1: Developing Acceptance:**

1. Speaking the unspoken - state shared anxieties and concerns as normal
  2. Share your own areas of normal nervousness to give permission and model
  3. Help members share their first impressions of being in the group
  4. Encourage initial sharing of safe material and model affirmations
  5. Begin setting norms about how people will interact and respect others
  6. Set a tone by discussing ways of interacting that promote success
  7. Explore similarities and commonalities among the members validating both
  8. Prepare members for dealing with differences
  9. Identify need for supporting demographically unique members
- 2. Relationships** (Do I want to spend time with these people? Who can I fit with? Who seems most like me? Who has similar concerns? How do I fit with the key members in this group? How do I fit with the leader?).

**Task 2: Relationship Building:**

1. Get members talking to each other rather than to the leaders
  2. Encourage safe disclosures of personal life among the members
  3. Use activities to get dyads and triads interacting to forge unique experiences
  4. Encourage the group to discuss and recommend to the leader
  5. Monitor habitual roles and find ways to experiment with new roles
  6. Defer to the group so they support each other and assume some control
- 3. Interaction** (How will I participate? Can I tell the truth about my life and what I think? Who will speak to me? Will they talk about what I say to others? Is the leader going to tell us how to fix things? Who controls what we talk about? What will I be required to talk about? Who controls how we speak to each other? Will they listen to me?).

**Task 3: Establishing Interaction:**

1. Constantly solicit input from the group
2. Let the group negotiate among themselves to establish rules and expectations
3. Defer to the group when members ask for your opinion
4. Reframe comments to ensure constructive interpretations and respect
5. Normalize reactions and concerns
6. Ensure full group input even if it is only nods and nonverbal
7. Process comments reflect on healthy interactive dynamics
8. Use interactional coaching to ensure people talk to each other
9. Judiciously use rounds if it won't involve serial individual discussions

## 2. Issues relating to the structure and purpose of the group.

1. **Goals/Purpose** (What is this group set up to do? What is in it for me? Can this group meet my needs? Will my concerns be taken seriously? What can we achieve? Is there a common purpose for being here? Can we all agree on why we are here?).

### **Task 1: Goal Setting:**

1. Highlight commonalities by exploring overlapping experiences and concerns
2. Introduce change by identify what people hope to get out of the group
3. Negotiating group goals use commonality and change to highlight the purpose
4. Touch individual goals try to highlight what each member might get out of group
5. Set the tone for mutual aid by getting members to talk among themselves
6. Solicit group input on how the group will run, activities etc.
7. Get the group input on rules and expectations
8. Contracting – write down or formalize the focus, rules and expectations

2. **Expectations** (What will I be expected to do? Who can help this get going? Am I a student or what? What are we going to do? Who will others be doing what if I join this group? What is the difference between us and the leader?)

### **Task 2: Role Setting:**

1. Model helpful roles and interactions when doing things for the group
2. Express appreciation when members perform helpful roles
3. Reflect on the group functioning with a focus on important and helpful roles
4. Label roles that you want to highlight as particularly important
5. Pre-empt problematic roles by identifying roles that might be disruptive
6. Assign positive roles to members who seem hesitant or possibly deviant
7. Use process comments to highlight respect and positive dynamics
8. Express your feelings (especially hope) about the group based on observations
9. Monitor role lock and intervene to switch up roles before members lock in

3. **Decision making and control** (What will I be made to do? How will this group operate? Will I be hurt? How are things decided? Do I have a say in how things go? Who has the power in this group?).

### **Task 3: Decision Making Development:**

1. Constantly solicit input and mutual aid from the members
2. Seek consensual decisions to establish norms
3. Redirect people to the group for decisions rather than answering structural issues
4. Frame issues that arise for the group to resolve rather than taking over
5. If the group bogs down, coach them in resolving the problem among themselves
6. Summarize issues as they emerge so the group can manage them
7. Ratify the group decisions by restating them and validating the decision
8. Coach the group in implementation by exploring the next steps